

APPENDIX 5. FIRST AUSTRALIAN SHIP TO SHORE WIRELESS TRANSMISSION

The following has been recorded in July 2001 by George Woodfull Stevens.

Between 8 July 1900 and 14 January 1903, my grandfather G.F.W.Stevens was the Senior Assistant Light Keeper at Point Lonsdale lighthouse. In May 1901 two VIP ships were due to enter Port Phillip Heads, and all lighthouse staff were on the alert. One ship was "Ophir" carrying the Duke and Duchess of York, later King George V and Queen Mary. The other was escort cruiser H.M.S St. George.

At this time a Mr H.W.Jenvey had a strong interest in the new science of wireless telegraphy, and with the permission of the Victorian Lighthouse Service, he set up a transmitter and receiver at the Point Lonsdale lookout station. As the ships approached Port Phillip Bay, Jenvey commenced transmitting and established a W/T link with H.M.S. St George.

My dad who was 3 years of age in 1901 and living in the lighthouse keeper's cottage, was understandably indifferent to this momentous occasion, but as he grew to become a young man, granddad would often recount the story of Jenvey's remarkable success. It was perhaps inevitable that this would have an effect on dad, and early in 1917 he wangled a job on a troop carrier as a junior wireless telegraphist. After two trips to UK ferrying troops and supplies, he was inducted into the R.A.N. and promoted at age 19 to C.P.O.Telegraphist. He was then appointed as the R.A.N. Telegraphist on Samarai Island, just off the SE tip of Papua. This was a key communications link between the UK and Australia and it was here that dad received and relayed the message in November 1918 that an Armistice had been declared in France. After serving in the R.A.N. for 3 years he followed a career in communications for the rest of his life first as a chief engineer for 3 commercial broadcasters, then as a Qantas pilot/navigator/telegraphist on the new Brisbane to Singapore route, and finally into airway operations in the then Department of Civil Aviation.

It was during dad's retirement in 1966 that OTC opened up a new overseas transmitting facility at Cape Schanck, and the son of H.W.Jenvey, Bill Jenvey came out of retirement as a former chief engineer for OTC to officiate the opening. All this was reported in the newspapers at the time.

Now dad, who was always a stickler for accuracy and who had much knowledge and experience of ship to shore W/T communication, challenged the reports that H.W.Jenvey conducted the first ship to shore W/T communication. First he wrote in May 1966 to his friend Harold White who was OTC's General Manager asking him to do a record search. Harold got his experts on the job and they discovered references to ship to shore communication in 1900 between the Queensland gunboat H.M.Q.S.Gayundah and the naval stores depot at Kangaroo Point. The records were not sufficiently conclusive for dad to accept as being totally correct, so he wrote next to the Acting Registrar, Department of the Navy, Victoria Barracks Melbourne.

Dad received two responses from Navy Office. The first dated 4 July 1966 stated that there was a difference of opinion between various Navy historians, some saying the Navy transmissions were in 1900 and others saying it was 1903. The letter concluded quote "... I will arrange to have Guyandah's log books examined to establish the

factual date of this interesting event in the history of wireless communication in Australia ..." unquote.

The second letter dated 13 July 1966 says that Gayundah's log books for 1900-01 revealed no reference to any wireless experiments, and " ...it is assumed that the year 1900 quoted by OTC is an error." The letter goes on to say that the book "History of the Queensland Marine Defence Force" by Commander N.S.Finley, M.B.E., R.A.N.R. quotes the year 1903 as the year of the experiments, but unfortunately gives no sources.

So, we know for a hard fact that the late H.W.Jenvey did establish effective two way W/T communication at Point Lonsdale with H.M.S. St. George in May 1901, just over 100 years ago, and until evidence to prove the Navy was the first to achieve this comes to light, first prize must continue to rest with Bill Jenvey's dad.